MIND OVER MATADOR

ROBBI MILLAR casts-a-net over THIN LIZZY in Spain

THE TROUBLE began on the border. While I sat twiddling my thumbs and feverishly checking out incomprehensible Reception in the hotel centre of grand old Madrid, Thin Lizzy were getting down to battle in that no-man's-land that separates Spain from Portugal.

Beneath a cloudy, dust-laden sky, insults were being traded, compromises sought and much-to-names dropped as our valiant fivesome tried in vain to secure for their number re-entry onto the rolling sierras of Espana. They say the blood ran like duty free brandy . . .

Or was it the other way around?

Actually, when the boys finally *did* get back into town, it was as a four-piece rather than the traditional five. The siesta de pesta at the airport had taken its toll. You see, Scott Gorham's passport had run out even before he left the murky shores of Britain and such is the organisation of mega bands these days, the vague pleas and promises were finally not enough to transport him to Madrid on the last customs-crossing of Thin Lizzy's Iberian tour.

Plus. Scott had mysteriously contracted some dreaded affliction of health while partying down in Lisbon; not through drinking the water but, nevertheless, an ailment that may well see Lizzy's Spring UK dates plastered with cancellation notices.

Therefore I, as the journalist, was just about the last person the band wanted to see creeping into their Real Madrid-annexed dressing room — whatever happened to the bloody bullring? — on that fateful Tuesday night. The Rods at Rock Against Sexism's annual wake could not have been a less welcome sight.

But, give them their due, Thin Lizzy are not the sort of combo to operate a Blackmore-style downer on the press. They even put up with an airborne Ross Halfin for a whole weekend! And after the initial foreboding, I'm proferred refreshments a-plenty and pick my place from which to view this rare trial of endurance sans Scott Gorham. Me — and about five thousand Spaniards . . .

IF YOU'D told me beforehand that Thin Lizzy could take on those five grand wops with depleted forces and score a direct hit, I'd have been something less than confident. After all, it isn't as if Gorham is one of the lesser known Thin men; more the best recognised face next to Lynott's mug and an essential half of the notorious twin guitar sound.

But the ghost of flamencan good fortune must have been in a generous mood as Lizzy proceeded to win hearts and create unbounded enthusiasm, the only casualties being keyboardist Darren Wharton's peace of mind — he had to fill in a major part of Scott's spot — and the absence of some of the more recent material, sacrificed for a somewhat 'greatest hits' collection.

No matter. This was still one of the most enjoyable TL gigs I've seen for at least a couple of calendar turns — warm and gutsy and friendly, all those spur-of-the-moment hassles bringing out the band's true fighting spirit.

The basic show, as you'd imagine, didn't differ that much from the one accompanying the 'Renegade' album at the tail-end of last year. The same fluttering red flags; the familiar multicolour neon logo. However, it was, you'd agree, something of a treat to witness Lizzy battering their way through 'You Keep On Knocking' *and* displaying the kind of give-it-hell approach generally missing from the established Big Band league.

'Angel Of Death' introduced the onslaught. All mean, moody synthesiser and swelling atmosphere, it succeeded where most doom disaster/holocaust horror anthems fail through wit and forethought before sliding into the slinky power of 'Renegade'.

'Alibi' and 'Jailbreak' were obvious choices in the circumstances along with 'Killer On The Loose' and the excellent 'Hollywood' — but 'Don't Believe A Word' was swopped around and slowed down to unusual effect while neither Snowy White's guitar nor Brian Downey's drum solo sported the usual gratuitous bung-em-in-somewhere tinge. For a last minute arrangement, Lizzy's show came over as both professional and sleek. I take my sombrero off to them.

PHIL LYNOTT wasn't so disappointed either. In the autograph-strewn, Spaniard-crammed aftermath, I asked if he'd imagined beforehand that the risk would be so successful. What did you expect? Modesty?

"I thought well it's only one date and then we can go back to Britain, rehearse properly and, if we have to do the German dates the same way, be prepared for it. But I enjoyed it. We didn't have to lick arse, y'know, say how wonderful Spain is, go on about the World Cup!"

Not that he intends to approach the UK concerts — originally intended for the purposes of making a follow-up video to 'Live And Dangerous' plus the opportunity to "let people know what we're up to now" — in the same manner.

"Oh no. No way. Scott's too much a part of the band in Britain. We wouldn't get away with it."

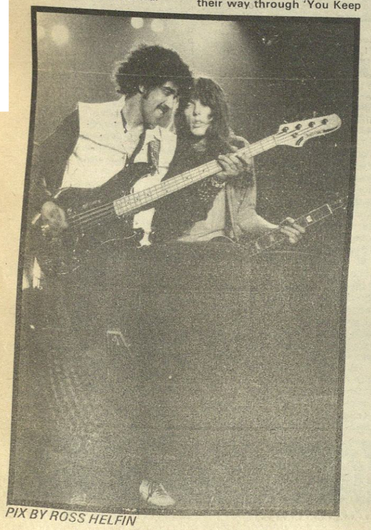
So, looking on the dark side, what *are* they going do do?

"I *don't* know. At the moment, I'm just hoping . . . I suppose we could advertise the gig as 'Phil Lynott plus guitarists'. I could have Eric Bell on to do 'Whisky In The Jar' and Robbo could do 'The Boys Are Back In Town'. Then Gary Moore could come on and do 'Parisienne Walkways' and Snowy could do 'Chinatown' and 'Hollywood'. For the encore, I'd just leave the stage — and let them get on with it!"

That, my friends, *was* a joke . . .

Almost as much of a joke was Thin Lizzy's appointment with 'Applauso' (??), Madrid's own version of that mime-show mediocrity 'Top Of The Pops', on which the band were scheduled to appear with Meat Loaf. Only problem was — Meat Loaf was located at a completely different time and place therefore the link lines were less than speedy and three hours stretched into five hours stretched into seven hours . . .

Lizzy were required to 'act' their way through 'Hollywood', 'Chinatown' and 'Jailbreak' poised beneath a lighting system the subtlety of which reminded me distinctly of



PIX BY ROSS HELFIN



the Closest Encounter of the Third Kind and egged on by a makeshift audience of wop-ettes whom, I'm sure, would have looked far more in place juxtapositioned to Buck's Fizz. And neither the cerveza cheapo nor the vino gratis could make up for Lynott's abject dislike of miming.

"I hate it," he sniffed. "I feel such a f***ing idiot, especially in front of all those people."

In the end, though, it was the little girls down the front that made his day, all the "flirtations and innuendos" passing back and forth between stage and audience. Ole!

SINCE PHIL Lynott is considered to be one of the great mouths of our time, it's tempting to just flick on the Sony and let him ramble. But 'Renegade' being the latest achievement in Lizzy's history, I decide to restrict the interview to that subject and throw a few song titles, ideas — thanks for the tip, Pete — at Lynott.

Starting with the swopover of producers from Kit Woolven to Chris Tsangarides.

"We'd worked with Chris before and liked his production. I originally had the idea of using Kit for both albums — the solo one, 'Fatalistic Attitude' and 'Renegade' — but it was a mistake in theory. Both producers have their positive points, it's just that Chris was better for the Lizzy sound."

It must be confusing doing two albums at the same time.

"My solo lp was actually finished before 'Renegade' but, because last time I found the two different records affecting each other, we decided to release 'Renegade' and hold 'Fatalistic Attitude' for a while. Otherwise, you'd get people thinking my solo stuff *was* Thin Lizzy and the Lizzy album was me going solo!"

OK then, tell me about 'Angel Of Death'.

"I was reading about the predictions of Nostradamus and I guess the song just came out. I'm not a great believer in star signs or the occult or UFOs but I believe there is a great unknown. I just lump 'em together as an unknown."

"Don't you think that all this nuclear holocaust stuff has been rather done into the ground in one way or another?

"Well, you know that line that goes 'Now I ask you, do you believe this to be true'? That's my saving grace. I don't know though. Songs like that come once in a blue moon."

What about 'Renegade'?

"I saw this Lizzy supporter on a bike. He'd got a Motorhead patch on his jacket with a Lizzy patch on *top* and 'renegade' written beneath. We were looking for an lp title at the time. Also, I was reading this book called 'The Rebel' by Albert Camus which suggested the idea of being a rebel from the inside. It sort of came in a blinding flash: the idea of there being a rebel in us all."

The idea of you being a rebel might have suited at one time. But now, with your lifestyle, does it really fit in?

"I'm black and I'm an Irishman and that should conflict with my affluence but it's got nothing to do with my *attitude*. I mean, Prince Charles teaching his wife how to shoot boars is hardly the image of a nice, benevolent king. Attitude and affluence *do* affect one another but it hasn't made me complacent.

"Affluence could well have dulled my sharpness — but I think my writing is *more* cutting now, besides which, when you have money you can do one of two things. Spend it wisely or foolishly. I spent it wisely."

THE RED flag imagery on 'Renegade'. Is that mere decoration?

"The idea came from a Dunhill cigarette packet, just about as far away from communism as you can get. The five stars represent the five people in Lizzy and the flag is just the symbol of a renegade, nothing to do with North Vietnam or anything. Anyway, how can anyone be in something as decadent as the rock business and be a communist?"

'The Pressure Will Drop'. At a risk, I'd say that women don't come off too well in many of your songs.

"'Pressure' is a love song written about this guy who finds out his girl's in secret liaison with someone else. He's telling her to leave before he explodes and uses violence on her so it's controlled anger. Some women are inclined to rub salt into wounds!

"I agree with you that women do tend to come off worse. That's not to say that they should but it's a true reflection on society. Now, 'No-One Told Him' is a song where the *guy* comes off worse. This guy is friendless. Nobody bothers to break the news to him that his girlfriend isn't interested anymore."

Is that based on experience?

"Not mine although it is about someone you know."

Who?

"I'm not telling. But it's an awful thing to happen, finding out last that you're being made a fool of."

Are many of your songs based on people you know or have known?

"Yes, I do tend to draw from experience. 'It's Getting Dangerous', that's about three friends of mine I knew when I started in the music business. We've grown apart in different directions. Really, it's about how you grow up and become opinionated or, maybe, *less* opinionated or, The drifting apart of friends."

There's a couple of songs on 'Renegade', 'Leave This Town' and 'Mexican Blood', that reinforce the view that Thin Lizzy are playing at cowboys these days.

"I suppose you could even call 'Whisky In The Jar' cowboyish. But how can you live in Europe and not be affected by Americana? 'Leave This Town' is the typical love 'em and leave 'em song — I nicked the idea from ZZ Top which is fair enough as they're my favourite band — while 'Mexican Blood' is really every cowboy plot you've ever seen rolled into one.

"Y'know, the one where the Mexican girl is going out with the Mexican boy who's on the run and seeing the marshall's son at the same time so the whole thing ends up in one great big shoot-out and the girl throws herself in front of the boy and gets killed. All the cliches."

YOU'RE FOND of cliches.

"Yeah. But only if they're done well. I think I get it from reading the music papers . . ."

Aside from the elpee, what happened with that drugs case last year?

"D'you know how the police got into my house? They said they were the Gas Board!"

Hmm. What with you and Lemmy, sounds like there might be some sort of police hit-list.

"Go on. Print that. I don't know if it's true but . . . it only happened *once* but each time I had to go back into court for the case, there was some headline in the papers saying 'Pop Star . . . Drugs' or something. They never said that there was only *one* case."

How's the ligging going?

"I have this *outrageous* name for ligging. Since January I've been in New York, Los Angeles, Scandinavia, Ireland, Spain, Portugal but, you know, if I go out *anywhere* this Saturday — my *one* night in London for ages — well, everybody'll know.

"I have nothing against ligging. You can pick up a lot; scandal, idle gossip, sometimes even the truth. But it gets a bit much. About five years ago I enjoyed being a 'personality'. I'd no responsibilities plus it wasn't a constant thing then but five years later I'm constantly being picked out. Sometimes you just want to turn around and say 'F*** off!'."

Would you have the same reaction to those who say that Thin Lizzy have turned pop?

"Pop. I don't know. We do make changes and expand but never too far in one move. Sometimes it's necessary to take two steps back in order to take one forward; why does everyone have to get better *all* the time?

"I tell you one thing though. Thin Lizzy are on their way straight back to the *top*."

AND STRAIGHT back to the airport as is in this case to take refuge in a few days' peace and quiet before heading off to round two, Germany and more calculated crises.

Amongst the duty free queues and inevitable passport queries, Lynott brandished a telegram newly arrived from the UK. It contained a message from Scott Gorham. The message read Good Luck and Carry On Without Me.

Now I ask you, do you believe . . .?

